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## THE PERSON OF THE TORTURER: SECRET POLICEMEN IN FICTION AND NON-FICTION

Early Modern conceptions of aesthetic education propose a necessary relation between aesthetic and moral values such that the appreciation of beauty is a necessary condition for the attainment of virtue. Contemporary conceptions retain the causal connection, claiming that the appreciation of literature in particular produces more responsive readers such that the aesthetic merits of novels are (also) moral merits. J.M. Coetzee agrees that there is a relation between the two spheres of value, but maintains that the novelist seeking to represent the secret policeman in a society that condones torture is faced with a dilemma: he or she must either portray the torturer by means of cliché and fail aesthetically or attribute glamour or grandeur to the world of the torturer and fail morally. In the case of torture, the aesthetic education thesis is thus opposed, as the aesthetic merit is (also) a moral defect. I shall argue that the dilemma is in fact false, comparing J.M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* with journalist Jacques Pauw's *In the Heart of the Whore*, an exposé of torture and assassination under apartheid that takes former secret policeman Dirk Coetzee as its protagonist.

### 1. In the Heart of the Country

Pauw's work is little-known outside of South Africa, so I begin with a sketch of the historical context in which both *In the Heart of the Whore* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* were conceived and published. In 1973 the General Assembly of the United Nations declared

apartheid – known by the various euphemisms of *separate development*, *multinationalism*, and *plural democracy* in South Africa – a crime against humanity.<sup>1</sup> At twenty-eight, Dirk Johannes Coetzee's star was rising in the South African Police, with promotion to warrant officer and qualification as a dog handler after only three years' service. John Maxwell Coetzee was thirty-three. He had recently returned to South Africa from the United States and was teaching at the University of Cape Town while writing his first novel. The following year, Dirk Coetzee was selected for deployment to Rhodesia as part of South Africa's military assistance to Ian Smith's government, J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* was published by Ravan Press, and the Bureau for State Security (better known by the erroneous acronym *BOSS*), began assassinating enemies of the state at home and abroad. 1977 was a landmark year for both Coetzees: Dirk was transferred to the Security Branch of the SAP and John received his first international acclaim as an author with *In the Heart of the Country*, his second novel. Like *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country* employed 'nonrealist or antirealist devices', and Coetzee would subsequently be criticised for failing to engage directly with the politics of contemporary South Africa in his fiction.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, in order to deflect international attention away from the internal injustices highlighted by the Soweto Uprising and the death of Steve Biko in police custody, Magnus Malan (the Chief of the South African Defence Force) attempted to set the defence of apartheid in the context of the Cold War by coining the phrase *total onslaught from Moscow*. When P.W. Botha, the former Minister of Defence, was elected Prime Minister in 1978, the country was placed on a war footing, a *total strategy* that included an increase in repressive measures at home, the destabilisation of neighbouring states, and an expansion of espionage activity abroad. 1980 was another important year for both Coetzee's: Dirk took command of the police unit at

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<sup>1</sup> For an informed discussion of the various labels employed for apartheid, see: Anne McClintock & Rob Nixon, "No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's 'Le Dernier Mot du Racisme'," *Critical Inquiry* 13 (1986), 140-154.

<sup>2</sup> Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

Vlakplaas, a farm near Pretoria, and John published *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the novel he subsequently described as being ‘about the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience.’<sup>3</sup> Although there are clear allusions to South Africa, the work is allegorical, set on the border of a nameless empire at an unspecified time when soldiers use muskets and policemen wear sunglasses. Dirk’s new command consisted of seventeen *askaris*, black nationalist insurgents who had been “turned” with the aim of establishing them as double agents in the armed struggle against apartheid.

Total strategy suffered a setback in 1981 when BOSS’s illegal activities were exposed with Gordon Winter’s publication of *Inside BOSS*. Botha, with Malan as his Minister of Defence, reconstituted the agency as the National Intelligence Service and secretly switched death squad duties to the SAP’s Security Branch. Coetzee reorganised his command, designated C10, as a counter-insurgency unit along the lines of the Selous Scouts in the former Rhodesia.<sup>4</sup> He ran the death squad for five months before being removed as a result of a diplomatic incident he caused in Swaziland and an internal police pornography scandal for which he was made scapegoat. The long disintegration of Dirk’s career was mirrored by the success of John’s, whose fourth novel – *Life & Times of Michael K* – won the Booker Prize in 1983. Two years later, with internal unrest approaching the level of civil war Coetzee had depicted in his latest fiction, Botha declared a State of Emergency, increasing the security services’ powers and immunity in thirty-six magisterial districts. In 1986, the State of Emergency was extended over the whole of South Africa. As Dirk Coetzee yielded to

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<sup>3</sup> J.M. Coetzee, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1986. Accessed December 17, 2014. <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-chamber.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> The unit is most commonly referred to by the name of its base, Vlakplaas, and its counter-insurgency (COIN) role. In keeping with the government’s attempts to hide the existence of a police death squad, the official designation was subsequently changed at least once, to C1. I shall use “C10” for the rest of this paper. See: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: Forgiving Apartheid’s Chief Killer* (London: Portobello, 2006), 74 & Jacques Pauw, *Dances with Devils: A Journalist’s Search for Truth* (Cape Town: Struik, 2006), 125-151.

pressure to resign from the police, J.M. Coetzee published *Foe* – his re-imagining of *Robinson Crusoe* – and the article quoted above, where he identifies two dilemmas for the representation of torture by novelists. At the beginning of 1988 a former military intelligence unit, the Civil Cooperation Bureau, was established as a second death squad to augment the efforts of C10. Although the CCB comprised former Special Forces operators, police detectives, and convicted criminals, it was established as an independent agency and allowed to operate with total autonomy and impunity. Opponents of apartheid were targeted in Belgium, France, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South West Africa, and South Africa.

Twelve months later, the last-ditch defence of apartheid came to a sudden end when Botha suffered a stroke. The irreversible dismantling of apartheid began with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group's overseeing of the transition to an independent Namibia and the appointment of the moderate F.W. de Klerk as State President. While de Klerk met Nelson Mandela in prison with a view to releasing him and lifting the ban on the African National Congress, Pieter Botes – a senior CCB operative – disclosed the existence of the organisation to Adriaan Vlok, the Minister of Law and Order, as a personal insurance policy.<sup>5</sup> In November, after nearly four years of harassment by his former colleagues, Dirk Coetzee decided to seek the protection of the ANC and agreed to let Jacques Pauw publish his account of C10. Pauw was a journalist employed by *Vrye Weekblad*, a liberal Afrikaner newspaper that opposed white minority rule and published “*Bloedspoor van die SAP*” eight days after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>6</sup> In April 1990, with Mandela released, opposition parties unbanned, and the Harms Commission investigating the death squads, Botes contacted Pauw. Five months later, J.M. Coetzee published *Age of Iron*, which has an explicit historical setting of Cape Town in 1986 and engaged with South African politics in a more

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1992), 180.

<sup>6</sup> In English: “Bloody Trail of the South African Police”.

straightforward manner than his previous novels. In February 1992, with his network of sources extended well beyond Dirk Coetzee and Botes, Pauw published *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads*, his exposé of both C10 and the CCB. The latter unit had been disbanded ten months previously; the former was still operational.

## 2. The Person of the Torturer

J.M. Coetzee identifies a dual dilemma for an author writing in the context of a regime that condones torture in his commentary on *Waiting for the Barbarians*.<sup>7</sup> The first is that the author either (1) ignores the existence of torture in a society or (2) represents the torture, propagating the very fear for which it has been employed. The author is thus consigned to either condoning the torture with his or her silence or unwittingly assisting in the terrorising of the population by the state.<sup>8</sup> The second dilemma concerns 'the person of the torturer'.<sup>9</sup> Either the author (a) resorts to cliché or (b) attributes a grandeur to the torturer's world that (i) misrepresents the character of the torturer and (ii) fails morally. Regarding (i), Coetzee has in mind the 'paradox in morality' revealed in the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials, the stark contrast between the triviality of the individuals on trial and the magnitude of their atrocities.<sup>10</sup> Coetzee's claim in (ii) is that the author is subject to the same criticisms levelled at the realist novelists of the nineteenth century, that they sought out the malicious and unpleasant for their own literary ends and aestheticized the morally reprehensible. The first dilemma is a moral one, a question of the proper response by an author to a regime that

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<sup>7</sup> Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber."

<sup>8</sup> Coetzee returned to this dilemma in "The Problem of Evil", a short story first published in *Salmagundi* and subsequently included in *Elizabeth Costello* (both in 2003). In "The Problem of Evil" he discusses the *person of the hangman* and focuses on the effects of representing evil on the author rather than on his or her readers. Employing the voice of his fictional alter-ego, Elizabeth Costello, he claims: "I do not think one can come away unscathed, as a writer, from conjuring up such scenes. I think writing like that can harm one" (J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* [London: Vintage, 2004], 172).

<sup>9</sup> Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber."

<sup>10</sup> Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber."

condones torture. The second dilemma is both moral and aesthetic: either the author (a) creates a work that is aesthetically flawed by resorting to cliché, or (b) creates a work that is morally flawed by attributing a lyricism, glamour, or grandeur to the world of the torturer. My concern is with the second dilemma, which provides a counter-example to the aesthetic education theses of Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum, both of whom argue that the experience of appreciating certain types of novels improves the responsiveness of readers to the situations, motivations, and shared humanity of other people.<sup>11</sup> Coetzee's claim is that authors who are opposed to torture become victims of the antagonism between aesthetic and moral value in the representation of the person of the torturer and are consequently condemned to either aesthetic or moral failure.

In "Torture and the Novel: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*", Susan Van Zanten Gallagher interprets Coetzee's novel in the light of his commentary and claims that he solves both of the dilemmas in the work.<sup>12</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher regards the two solutions as related so I shall include a brief discussion of the first before proceeding to the second. The dilemma of the representation of torture is solved by Coetzee's refusal to portray torture realistically, his use of a deliberately vague spatio-temporal setting of which very little can be stated with authority except that the Empire is located in the northern hemisphere and that it's civilization is largely pre-industrial. 'Coetzee creates an allegorical landscape that loosely suggests the Roman Empire on the verge of collapse but undoubtedly points to South Africa today.'<sup>13</sup> The allegorical character of the narrative sets the South African situation in the broader context of colonialism and thus avoids either ignoring the employment of torture in

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Rorty's thesis is presented in: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Martha Nussbaum's thesis is articulated across numerous papers, edited collections, and monographs published from 1983 to 2002, but is most clearly and concisely presented in: *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, "Torture and the Novel: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*," *Contemporary Literature* 29 (1988), 277-285.

<sup>13</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher, "Torture and the Novel," 281.

South Africa or contributing to the fear inspired by that torture. Coetzee's use of allegory is doubly effective. First, the novel becomes not only about apartheid South Africa, but all regimes that torture their citizens, including those contemporary to its publication – the Soviet Union, Chile, Argentina – and those before and since. Second, the novel reveals South Africa as a European colony in a postcolonial era, pointing to the violence at the foundation of all empires. Coetzee begins his article on *Waiting for the Barbarians* by quoting Nathaniel Hawthorne on the necessity of cemeteries and prisons to colonies and alludes to Hawthorne's description of prisons in the novel itself.<sup>14</sup>

Van Zanten Gallagher identifies the solution to the second dilemma as more complicated than the first, but it is here that we part company as I shall argue that Coetzee fails to solve the problem of the representation of the person of the torturer.<sup>15</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher claims that Coetzee portrays both of the torturers described in the novel – Colonel Joll and Warrant Officer Mandel of the Third Bureau of the Civil Guard – as moral vacuums. The absence of morality and humanity is reflected in the impenetrability of their eyes, the continual wearing of sunglasses by Joll and the blank quality of Mandel's gaze: 'I look into his clear blue eyes, as clear as if there were crystal lenses slipped over his eyeballs. He looks back at me. I have no idea what he sees.'<sup>16</sup> In this way, the torturers are represented as distinct from the magistrate, the *man of conscience* who narrates the novel. The world of the secret police is inaccessible and incomprehensible to the narrator, but there are nonetheless similarities between magistrate and torturer. Van Zanten Gallagher maintains that Coetzee represents the person of the torturer by means of the magistrate's comparison of himself with Joll.

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<sup>14</sup> See: J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Penguin, 1980), 79.

<sup>15</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher, "Torture and the Novel," 282.

<sup>16</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 118.



The comparison is made explicit when the magistrate's nightly ritual of washing and massaging the barbarian victim of torture takes a sexual turn. The following morning, he is met with blankness from the girl and asks himself:

“What do I have to do to move you?” [...] “Does no one move you?”; and with a shift of horror I behold the answer that has been waiting all the time offer itself to me in the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me.<sup>17</sup>

Once the magistrate has returned the girl to her people he admits his affinity with Joll, the way in which they have both treated her as a means rather than an end and desired to make their respective marks on her.<sup>18</sup> He concludes,

For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite of the cold rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two sides of imperial rule, no more, no less.<sup>19</sup>

According to Van Zanten Gallagher, Coetzee resolves the second dilemma by blurring the distinction between the torturer and the man of conscience, thereby asserting that all citizens of the empire share moral responsibility for the torturer's atrocities.<sup>20</sup> Her claim recalls a comment Pauw would later make when discussing Dirk Coetzee's successor in C10: ““It's very important that every white South African takes responsibility for the actions of convicted [death-squad] leader Eugene de Kock, because he did it in our name.””<sup>21</sup> J.M.

Coetzee's solution to the second dilemma thus draws on the solution to the first: the setting of the story in a generic colonial context allows torture to be represented without promoting fear and allows the person of the torturer to be represented as a product of that colonial context for

<sup>17</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher, “Torture and the Novel,” 284.

<sup>19</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Van Zanten Gallagher, “Torture and the Novel,” 284.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Pauw quoted in John Battersby, “Admitting White Guilt,” *The World Today* 53 (1997), 23-25: 24.

which all its citizens are to some extent responsible. The shared responsibility for torture is emphasised by the erosion of the distinction between the magistrate and Joll, culminating in their representation as two sides of the imperial coin.

If this resolution of the dilemma is to succeed, the similarity between the torturer and the guilty man of conscience must be unequivocal, but it is not. There are only two clear comparisons between the magistrate and Joll, both of which are quoted above. In keeping with the vagueness that permeates the whole novel and is partly constitutive of its success as an allegory, there are three – or perhaps four – torturers represented. The narrative begins with Joll's arrival in the edge of empire backwater and he mentions his 'assistant', an anonymous individual of whom all one learns is his gender.<sup>22</sup> The magistrate is arrested by an anonymous warrant officer from the Third Bureau when he returns from repatriating the girl. When Mandel is finally named, he is also described as having an 'underling' of whom one also only learns his gender.<sup>23</sup> The implication is that the assistant and underling are two different men and that the former (though perhaps not the latter) is from the Third Bureau, but it is impossible to be certain.

While the comparisons that Van Zanten Gallagher employs as evidence for her argument are between the magistrate and Joll, it is Mandel the magistrate comes to know best, in the intimacy of the torture chamber. In contrast with his constant antagonism towards Joll, which begins in the first sentence of the novel with his silent ridicule of the sunglasses, the magistrate empathises with Mandel on several occasions:

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<sup>22</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 116.

The road to the top must be hard for young men without money, with the barest of schooling, men who might as easily go into lives of crime as into the service of the Empire.<sup>24</sup>

The magistrate's various attempts to understand Mandel nonetheless all fail to penetrate beyond the crystal lenses of his blank exterior. When he is released from custody, he asks Mandel how he balances the demands of his job with everyday life, but receives only abuse in response.<sup>25</sup> Mandel thus remains as inaccessible as Joll and the magistrate concludes that 'the care of souls seems to have left no more mark on him than the care of hearts leaves on the surgeon.'<sup>26</sup>

Joll's expeditionary force is defeated by the barbarians – or perhaps the elements, uncertainty is all-pervasive – and his flight to the capital is made via the magistrate's town, setting the scene for a final confrontation between the two sides of empire. This crisis is both the only occasion on which the magistrate extends empathy to Joll and the only appearance of Joll without his sunglasses:

His face is naked, washed clean, perhaps by the blue moonlight, perhaps by physical exhaustion. I stare at his pale high temples. Memories of his mother's soft breast, of the tug in his hand of the first kite he ever flew, as well of those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him, shelter in that beehive. He looks at me, his eyes searching my face. The dark lenses are gone.<sup>27</sup>

The magistrate launches into the lesson he has prepared for Joll, but the torturer does not respond and quickly resumes his flight. There is no insight into the nature of the relationship between the two men beyond that already gained, the magistrate's recognition of shared

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<sup>24</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 126.

<sup>26</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 146.

responsibility for imperial atrocity. Joll thus departs from the narrative in the same way he entered, blank and incomprehensible with or without his sunglasses.

In avoiding the moral pitfalls of representing the person of the torturer, Coetzee impales himself firmly on the aesthetic horn of the dilemma. He describes the aesthetic failing of the author thus:

If he intends to avoid the clichés of spy fiction – to make the torturer neither a figure of satanic evil, nor an actor in a black comedy, nor a faceless functionary, nor a tragically divided man doing a job he does not believe in – what openings are left?<sup>28</sup>

Mandel and Joll are both faceless functionaries. The fact that Coetzee's lack of characterisation is intentional, that he makes the facelessness conspicuous in the descriptions of Joll's mask and Mandel's blankness, does not eliminate the flaw. Van Zanten Gallagher is therefore in error when she claims that Coetzee resolves the second dilemma. He has not solved the problem of the representation of the person of the torturer, but rather opted – commendably, given the context in which he was writing – to create a work that is aesthetically rather than morally flawed. Better to represent torturers as faceless functionaries than engender sympathy for them, especially in a society where torture and assassination are sanctioned by the state. If aesthetic and moral values cannot be reconciled in the case of torture, then the latter must take precedence. Coetzee's deliberate resort to cliché is nonetheless a flaw in an otherwise exemplary work that leaves one with a sense of learning a great deal about the violence essential to empire, but very little about the men empires employ to do their dirty work. In the remainder of this paper, I shall show how Pauw succeeds where Coetzee fails, providing a satisfying alternative to the second dilemma.

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<sup>28</sup> Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber."

### 3. In the Heart of the Whore

Pauw offers insight into the character of four assassins in *In the Heart of the Whore*. Six of the sixteen chapters in the book are focused on Dirk Coetzee, one each on the stories of Leslie Johannes Lesia and Ronald Desmond Bezuidenhout, and the remainder on the histories of the two death squads, C10 and the CCB. Both Lesia and Bezuidenhout were themselves imprisoned without trial and tortured for long periods, the former by Robert Mugabe's security services and the latter by the ANC's military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. Bezuidenhout's story is particularly pathetic because he was employed by the NIS to infiltrate the ANC, was forced to become a white *askari* and sent back to South Africa as a double agent, and was then attached to C10 for a year before being remanded to a secure psychiatric hospital. Pauw's book ends with Bezuidenhout on the run from the SAP, his loyalty to his original masters rewarded by becoming one of their targets.<sup>29</sup> I do not have space to discuss the way in which Bezuidenhout and Lesia are portrayed by Pauw in detail, suffice to say that they are represented as simultaneous perpetrators and victims of the apartheid system and that Pauw's pleasure when Lesia is accepted back into his community is palpable.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Bezuidenhout and Lesia, Pauw does not portray Coetzee as a victim or figure of pity. Over the course of his exposé, he presents a mature and nuanced perspective of a complex and immoral – but not irredeemable – individual. Pauw's reaction to Coetzee and the other assassins is nevertheless clear: 'I remain aghast and saddened at what I saw and heard.'<sup>31</sup> My claim is that he avoids both the moral horn of the dilemma and the clichés of demon, antihero, faceless functionary, and divided soul in his representation of Dirk Coetzee. Pauw achieves this by means of a simple but effective aesthetic technique, the creation of a

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<sup>29</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 264-269.

<sup>30</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 200-202.

<sup>31</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, iii.

pattern of comparison and contrast between Coetzee and the fourth assassin, Pieter Botes of the CCB.

Pauw first met Coetzee in 1984, spent a great deal of time with him during the course of writing his book, and held an ambivalent attitude towards the assassin:

We did the last of our interviews on the way to the airport. It was an emotional farewell. As I embraced Coetzee I realised that over the weeks, I had grown very close to this man whom I probably would have otherwise despised.<sup>32</sup>

Pauw's overriding concern is admirable, the sense of responsibility he feels for Coetzee. Although Coetzee was a willing participant in the interviews – he had been trying to tell his story for years – the publication of the newspaper article placed his life at risk from both the ANC and the SAP. Pauw attributes Coetzee's death squad activities to his acceptance of National Party ideology, his patriotism, and his immersion in SAP culture, all of which gave him a strong sense of purpose.<sup>33</sup> As such, he was at least dedicated to a creed – albeit an immoral one – rather than committing crimes against humanity for personal gain or pleasure. Pauw also depicts Coetzee as pitiless, unrepentant, violent, treacherous, and intolerant, however, and makes no attempt to disguise his many moral failings.<sup>34</sup> Pauw's sympathy is most evident when Coetzee testifies to the Harms Commission in London, inviting his readers to understand Coetzee's peculiar predicament: in this, his first attempt to take responsibility for his atrocities, he is abandoned by his wife, makes a fool of himself with his poor command of English, and is faced with a hostile judge eager to discredit evidence of death squad activity.<sup>35</sup> Pauw is troubled by Coetzee's lack of remorse, but concedes that 'he spoke with great confidence and the sincerity of a man who had to rid himself of a terrible

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<sup>32</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 64, 71 & 112.

<sup>34</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 73-75.

<sup>35</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 219-226.

burden.’<sup>36</sup> Pauw maintains that Coetzee’s decision to confess and seek asylum with the ANC was primarily the result of his desire to give his life the direction he lost when his police career imploded.<sup>37</sup> He was, in other words, neither motivated by purely selfless nor purely selfish considerations. Of Coetzee’s character, Pauw concludes:

The life of Dirk Coetzee, I believe, is one of wasted talents and missed opportunities.

He can certainly never be presented as a shining example of a crusader for what is right and proper, but he has always been honest, open and loyal to me.<sup>38</sup>

One should keep in mind that this appraisal is from a man who is a crusader for what is right and proper, and has – like Coetzee – placed his own life at risk. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission seem to have concurred with Pauw. Coetzee returned to South Africa in 1993 and was granted amnesty from criminal and civil prosecution in 1997, one of only twelve percent of successful applicants.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding, Coetzee is, like Botes, a death squad commander who demonstrates little if any remorse. Pauw sets up the two men as counterparts – one from C10, the other from the CCB – but uses a variety of narrative means to emphasise the contrasts between them, beginning with his introduction to each:

- (1) Sitting cross-legged on the beach under a swaying palm tree, slowly sipping a frosty beer, was Dirk Johannes Coetzee, his handsome face tanned and clean-shaven, a slick of hair over his forehead. [...] Dirk Coetzee is a former security policeman, holder of the police medal for faithful service, the best

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<sup>36</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 220.

<sup>37</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Tina Rosenberg, “A South African Killer Goes Free,” *New York Times*, August 11, 1997. Accessed March 24, 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/11/opinion/a-south-african-killer-goes-free.html>>.

student of his police college intake nearly twenty years earlier. But Dirk Coetzee was no ordinary policeman.<sup>40</sup>

- (2) There are two things that Pieter Botes loves to boast about. The one is how he “stuffed up the enemy” in Mozambique; the other is the “gravy” he made out of Albie Sachs’s right arm.<sup>41</sup>

Coetzee is introduced in an apparently casual setting, two men relaxing with drinks on a beach. The initial impression foregrounds positive features – his good looks and success as a police officer – before he is revealed as the killer of Griffiths Mxenge, a human rights lawyer assassinated in 1981. The first mention of Botes is of him boasting, an objectionable trait exacerbated by the fact that he is boasting about men he has killed or maimed. Botes’ boasting is not only repugnant, but reveals his lack of intelligence: the bomb he planted was intended to kill Sachs (another human rights lawyer), not disable him and Sachs was appointed a Judge of the Constitutional Court in South Africa in 1994. Pauw keeps Botes’ disagreeability firmly in his readers’ minds when he notes that after their first meeting, he ‘constantly referred to the Sachs operation in his smugly macabre way’.<sup>42</sup>

A further comparison between Coetzee and Botes is that both fell foul of their death squad superiors before agreeing to speak to Pauw. Pauw accords greater priority to their motives than to the actual whistleblowing, however, and thus employs the similarity to establish a wider gap between the two assassins. Where Coetzee is represented as seeking purpose in his life, Botes is represented as seeking only financial reward. Of his former employers, he states: “‘They haven’t paid me or my men. I am going to stuff them up.’”<sup>43</sup> In 1989, Botes was happy to plan the assassination Robert Davies despite the lack of proof connecting the

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<sup>40</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 173.

<sup>43</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 174.



academic to *Umkhonto we Sizwe*.<sup>44</sup> Less than a year later, with the writing on the wall for apartheid, Botes plans to raise a death squad to hunt down CCB operatives on behalf of the ANC in exchange for a quarter of a million rand.<sup>45</sup> Again, the proposal is as idiotic as it is immoral. Perhaps the most damning indictment of Botes' character is revealed in a meeting between Botes, Pauw, and Pauw's editor, Max du Preez. Pauw and Du Preez have already consumed a considerable amount of alcohol when Botes offers them *mampoer*, an illegal home-brewed spirit that standardly has an alcohol content of over sixty percent. After a few drinks each, Pauw and De Preez politely decline the next.

"I will show you what I do to people who refuse to drink my mampoer," he said. He left the room and came back with a grain bag, from which he drew a Russian-manufactured RPG rocket launcher. He put the launcher against the wall and said: "Now you will drink my pear mampoer." We finished the bottle. On the way back to Johannesburg, Du Preez was overcome by temporary blindness and stopped the car in the middle of the highway.<sup>46</sup>

The contrast to the relationship of mutual trust Pauw enjoys with Coetzee is stark, but the above passage also works in a more subtle manner, setting their respective personalities at odds with each other: sipping beers on the beach with Coetzee versus drinking poison at RPG-point with Botes. As opposed to Pauw's last word on Coetzee as a wasted talent, his final comment on Botes expresses his contempt: 'Underneath the bloody bravado of a Pieter Botes and the gleeful torture talk of a James Stevens I have found men of moral straw.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 186.

<sup>45</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 189.

<sup>46</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 176.

<sup>47</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 262. James Stevens was police officer who covered up crimes committed by Eugene de Kock, then worked for the ANC, and finally betrayed them and Coetzee. Like Botes, his motive seems to have been pure self-interest.

Pauw's play of identity and difference in his portrayal of the two death squad commanders invites a judgement of Coetzee as morally reprehensible, but not beyond redemption. If one accepts Pauw's perspective on Coetzee, then one also accepts that shock and sadness are more appropriate responses to him than disgust or contempt. As such, Coetzee's story becomes more interesting and his place as the protagonist of Pauw's narrative makes the work more rather than less compelling. The comparison and contrast of characters or objects is an aesthetic technique common to numerous art forms and modes of representation. With respect to moral character, the technique is especially effective in narrative representations. Noël Carroll explains this employment in his discussion of the television series *The Sopranos*, of whose protagonist he states 'among an array of ethically challenged characters, he is one of the least deplorable.'<sup>48</sup> The result is that, in *The Sopranos*, the audience becomes in some sense allied to Tony Soprano and adopts a pro-attitude towards him. Such a description would be too strong of Coetzee, but Pauw's presentation of him as one of the least deplorable assassins in the tale of apartheid's death squads makes readers more likely to adopt an ambivalent rather than a hostile attitude towards him. To employ Carroll's term, Pauw's construction of the 'moral economy' of his exposé identifies Coetzee (as well as Lesia and Bezuidenhout) as being within the sphere of readers' moral concern.<sup>49</sup>

Returning to J.M. Coetzee, recall that the author wishing to represent the person of the torturer must either fail aesthetically by resorting to cliché or fail morally by attributing grandeur to the torturer's world. There is no grandeur attributed to either the torturer or his world by Pauw. He does not shy away from Dirk Coetzee's immorality and there is never any doubt about the extent to which all death squad operatives have committed despicable crimes. There is thus no question of excusing Coetzee from responsibility for his atrocities

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<sup>48</sup> Noël Carroll, *Minerva's Night Out: Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 242.

<sup>49</sup> Carroll, *Minerva's Night Out*, 243.

and the issue of amnesty and forgiveness is left open. Pauw also avoids transferring the grandeur from the torturer to his world by means of the short chapters devoted to Lesia and Bezuidenhout respectively. There is no glamour, grandeur, or glory whatsoever in either of these brief biographies. As mentioned above, Bezuidenhout's story – titled "In the heart of darkness" – is nothing short of pitiful. The victim of an abusive childhood, his aggression was fine-tuned in the SADF's Special Forces before he was abandoned by the NIS, tortured by the ANC for three years, and then exploited once again by Eugene de Kock in C10. *In the Heart of the Whore* ends with Bezuidenhout's testimony and the picture of the world of the death squad with which the reader is left – of a dangerous, mentally-unstable, substance-addicted assassin on the run from friend and foe – is disgraceful, appalling, and bleak beyond measure.

My main interest, however, is whether Pauw has avoided the aesthetic horn of J.M. Coetzee's dilemma. Dirk Coetzee is not depicted as a demon, antihero, or faceless functionary. Nor is he depicted as a divided soul, torn between – for example – his duties as an assassin and the demands of family life or his loyalty to the police and his moral conscience. Coetzee insulated his domestic from his professional life, like most death squad operatives, and failed to recognise the conflict between his duties as a police officer and his lawbreaking. Pauw does not resort to cliché, but one might ask how he represents the man towards whom he invites a combination of condemnation and understanding. The most accurate answer is that Coetzee's character emerges as a paradigm of David Hume's account of personal identity as 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.'<sup>50</sup> Coetzee portrayed by Pauw is a complex individual, a discontented mass of contradictions seeking an overriding

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<sup>50</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), I.4.vi: 674.

purpose to unite his various vices and virtues into a stable personality and ultimately failing. The veracity of Pauw's portrayal is to some extent borne out by Coetzee's post-apartheid career. He hoped to be able to return to duty in the reconstituted police service after being granted amnesty, but clashed with his ANC colleagues. He spent the rest of his life as a civilian, a status with which he was never satisfied, dying of kidney failure in 2013 at the age of sixty-seven.<sup>51</sup> Whatever judgement one ultimately makes of Coetzee – a wasted opportunity or beneath contempt – he nonetheless emerges from Pauw's narrative as a carefully-drawn and fully-developed character, of much more interest than J.M. Coetzee's Joll. In his depiction of Dirk Coetzee, Pauw therefore solves the problem of the representation of the torturer, reconciling the aesthetic with the moral and succeeding where J.M. Coetzee fails.

#### 4. The Problem that Troubles the Novelist

In J.M. Coetzee's defence, he is concerned with the dilemma faced by the novelist rather than the author in general. Coetzee praises anti-apartheid activist Breyten Breytenbach's memoir, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, with its exploration of

the spiritual sphere in which the police live. They are human beings who find it possible to leave the breakfast table in the morning, kiss their children goodbye and drive off to the office to commit obscenities.<sup>52</sup>

Because the work is a memoir rather than a novel, a work of non-fiction rather than fiction, Coetzee maintains that Breytenbach is not faced with the dilemma of representing the person

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<sup>51</sup> See: Gavin Evans, "Dirk Coetzee: Death squad commander who helped expose apartheid's killing machine," *The Independent*, March 12, 2013. Accessed March 24, 2015.

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/dirk-coetzee-death-squad-commander-who-helped-expose-apartheids-killing-machine-8530136.html>>. As a point of interest, J.M Coetzee also clashed with the ANC government, emigrating to Australia in 2002. See: Lucy Valerie Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber."

of the torturer. He does not have to ‘justify a concern with morally dubious people involved in a contemptible activity’.<sup>53</sup> Coetzee’s idea is that the writer of non-fiction avoids the moral horn of the dilemma as the intention behind his work is not subject to the same criticism as that of the novelist. The non-fiction writer is not accused of perverse fascination with the torturers’ world, but is assumed to be motivated by revealing that world to those from whom it is hidden, i.e. exposing the world of apartheid’s secret police to white South Africans so that they are aware of the crimes against humanity committed by their government. Pauw offers support for this claim when he states that regardless of one’s opinion of Dirk Coetzee’s motives, he has performed a service to society:

Many of the people of Nazi Germany would later say: “Wir haben es nicht gewusst” (We did not know). South Africans will have no such excuse. Dirk Coetzee has warned us all.<sup>54</sup>

The novelist, writing about fictional torturers, cannot claim to be serving such a purpose and therefore – according to J.M. Coetzee – needs to justify his or her literary activity.

One could respond to Coetzee’s claim about the difference in the motives attributed to novelists and journalists by pointing to *Waiting for the Barbarians* itself: despite its status as not only fiction, but allegorical fiction without a clear spatio-temporal location, the novel provides a wealth of information about the nature of empires. As Anthony Burgess writes in his review, the work ‘is not about anywhere, and hence it is about everywhere’.<sup>55</sup> There are two separate questions that bear on the distinction made by Coetzee: first, the various differences between fiction and non-fiction, and second, the relation between fiction and truth. Both have deservedly generated a vast amount of philosophical and critical discussion to which I have no wish to contribute here. I shall therefore set aside the question of if and

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<sup>53</sup> Coetzee, “Into the Dark Chamber.”

<sup>54</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Burgess quoted in Van Zanten Gallagher, “Torture and the Novel,” 281.

how fictions reveal truth about the world and accept that the novelist faces a dilemma with regard to the representation of torture that the journalist does not: unlike the journalist, the novelist is required to justify his or her concern with the person of the torturer.

I now want to suggest that the structure of *In the Heart of the Whore* – which represents the relevant sequence of events as a narrative in which Dirk Coetzee is the protagonist – places Pauw in a parallel dilemma to that of J.M. Coetzee in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As noted in §3, more than a third of Pauw's book is devoted to Dirk Coetzee's story. Pauw is writing an exposé of the death squads rather than a biography of one or more of the members thereof and thus has no need to accord a single assassin such prominence. Coetzee's role in the history of the death squads is furthermore relatively minor. He happened to be in charge of C10 when it was re-designated as a counter-insurgency unit, but spent only five months on operations. De Kock served as the unit's commander from 1983 until it was disbanded in 1993 and became South Africa's most notorious secret policeman. Coetzee was not even the first assassin whose story appeared in print: four weeks prior to the publication of Pauw's article Butana Almond Nofemela, one of Coetzee's former *askaris*, disclosed details of his C10 service in an attempt to delay his impending execution for the murder of a white farmer in 1987.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, while the existence of C10 is shocking, the police unit pales in comparison with the CCB, due to the latter's almost complete lack of accountability. The CCB was formed as a private company rather than a branch of the South African government and its only point of contact with the government was through the chief of the SADF's Special Forces. The absolute autonomy afforded the CCB caused so much confusion that it is still unknown whether the murder of Anton Lubowski in 1989 was part of their attempts to disrupt Namibian independence or an inadvertent blue-on-blue assassination of another

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<sup>56</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 22-23.

apartheid agent.<sup>57</sup> Pauw's exposé is focused on the CCB, formed three years after Coetzee's expulsion from the fold of the South African security services, and his decision to employ Coetzee as the protagonist of his narrative creates a journalist's version of the novelist's dilemma.

In Carroll's introduction to his paper on *The Sopranos*, he states his intent as solving the problem of 'how a viewer can be sympathetic (care for, or have a pro-attitude) toward a fictional character whose real-world counterpart she would abhor totally'.<sup>58</sup> In Pauw's case, the problem is how to maintain the interest of a reader in a real person whom she has every reason to despise. Articulated in this way, Pauw's dilemma is very similar to J.M. Coetzee's. Where J.M. Coetzee is required to justify his literary interest in a morally reprehensible character, Pauw is required to justify his selection of a morally reprehensible character as his protagonist. Coetzee cannot excuse himself on the basis of revealing the truth (because he is writing fiction, given my assumptions above), but Pauw cannot excuse himself on the basis of revealing the truth either because he could simply have devoted a single chapter to Coetzee in the manner of Lesia and Bezuidenhout. Coetzee must justify his selection of the content (the person of the torturer) of his novel and Pauw must justify his selection of the form of his narrative (Dirk Coetzee as protagonist). J.M. Coetzee's dilemma can be adjusted for Pauw as: either failing morally by glamourizing Dirk Coetzee's world or failing aesthetically by portraying Dirk Coetzee's character in cliché. Pauw's dilemma is in fact more pressing than J.M. Coetzee's. Many viewers would find no inconsistency in being happy to see Tony Soprano escape the clutches of the law and happy to see his real-world counterpart imprisoned for life. If, however, one takes an interest in Dirk Coetzee's character, motivation, and morality – as Pauw intends – then one faces disturbing questions about

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<sup>57</sup> Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore*, 165.

<sup>58</sup> Carroll, *Minerva's Night Out*, 235.

justice. These questions have recently been brought into focus with the controversy surrounding the release of De Kock, just twenty years into his sentence of two hundred and twelve years for a host of death squad activities.<sup>59</sup> Once again, I am approaching the issue of the difference between fiction and non-fiction – reader response and engagement – so I shall conclude my line of thought by stating that the necessary dilemma faced by the novelist and the dilemma Pauw imposes on himself are sufficiently alike to admit of a similar solution. In other words, J.M. Coetzee could have employed Pauw's solution to the problem of the representation of the person of the torturer, but did not.

I described Pauw's pattern of comparison and contrast in §3 and his representation of Dirk Coetzee in *In the Heart of the Whore* exposes J.M. Coetzee's second dilemma as false. J.M. Coetzee's resolution of the first dilemma, the representation of torture in the novel, is – as Van Zanten Gallagher and many others have noted – inspired. He nonetheless fails to resolve the second dilemma, impaling himself on the aesthetic horn and portraying his torturers as (literally) faceless functionaries. In contrast, Pauw's depiction of Dirk Coetzee's character as multifaceted and conflicted, combining serious moral flaws with virtues like sincerity and loyalty, is neither a moral nor an aesthetic failing. To this extent, the novelist as well as the journalist can represent the person of the torturer without moral or aesthetic compromise. The case of the torturer thus fails to expose an opposition between aesthetic and moral values in novels and does not serve as a counter-example to contemporary theses of aesthetic education. The aesthetic merits of *In the Heart of the Whore* are (also) moral merits in that they promote greater responsiveness on the part of readers. For all its great value as literature, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is aesthetically flawed to the extent that it resorts to clichés in the representation of Joll and Mandel. Paraphrasing Pauw and Coetzee, one might call the novel

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<sup>59</sup> David Smith, "South African death squad leader Eugene de Kock to be freed from jail," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2015. Accessed March 25, 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/30/south-africa-eugene-de-kock-released-prime-evil>>.



*a missed opportunity to fold the flesh of the torturers aside and peer into their souls.* As such, this aesthetic flaw is (also) a moral flaw and the relation between aesthetic and moral value proposed by Rorty and Nussbaum is preserved.